THE BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHETLAND MOVEMENT, 1977-1980

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Without a doubt the most significant development in Shetland politics in the closing years of the decade has been the emergence of the Shetland Movement, the first political organisation to be established in the islands independently of the four main UK mainland parties. The rise of the Shetland Movement - in a community which generally eschews political commitment and involvement - is notable not least because in the first year of its existence it succeeded in enlisting more members than any of the four main parties.

The Movement began to attract widespread news coverage only when it promoted its constitution for an autonomous Shetland in February 1980: previously its development had been catalogued only by "The Shetland Times", "The Scotsman", and BBC Radio Shetland. With poor lines of journalistic communication between Shetland and the outside world, little has been written so far about the founding and growth of the Movement, let alone about its decision-making processes and structure, or about the reasons why it has had a ready appeal to the electorate. It is to these questions that this article is addressed.

It was in 1977 that the Shetland Group was founded. A small number of activists - predominantly middle class and residents of Lerwick - banded together to discuss how Shetland might achieve a greater degree of control over her own affairs. The group represented the first organised expression of a sentiment which had been fashionable amongst a small middle-class elite in Lerwick (but generally considered in the wider community to be an impractical pipedream) since a Zetland County Council delegation to Faroe in 1962 had concluded that the vitality of that island group's economy stemmed largely from its political autonomy. The Group was officially formed at a public meeting attended

by about 60 people in Lerwick, which had been called according to James Irvine, first chairman of the successor Shetland Movement, "to ascertain whether or not the people of Shetland were concerned about their future."[1] The meeting, held in February 1977, strongly endorsed a proposal to "attempt to seek some sort of special status for Shetland", and selected a group of 14 to discuss how Shetland could attain autonomy during a volatile period in Anglo-Scottish relations.

The Group adopted a significantly different approach to devolution from Shetland Islands Council, whose main aim was not of course autonomy for Shetland but to protect their agreements with the oil industry and their status as a most-purpose authority. The Council, while calling for a commission to investigate Shetland's problems, did not actively seek broader powers for itself beyond those it had already achieved under the local government acts and the Zetland County Council Act of 1974.[2] Instead it concentrated on what it considered to be a threat to those acts from the possibility of Scottish devolution. The Shetland Group, on the other hand, did not consider the rise of devolutionist feeling in Scotland to be a threat to Shetland. It argued that "the need for a greater say in our affairs is of paramount importance irrespective of Scottish devolution".[3]

Two other things should be said about the Shetland Group. Firstly, its members described it as non-political, a clear contradiction in terms and a phrase much used by their successor movement in deference to the widespread belief in Shetland that politics are an evil and unnecessary burden on the community. What the Group in fact meant was that they did not fit into a UK (or Scottish) political framework, and that the allegiances of individual members to the political parties of the south could be held concurrently with their membership of the Group.

Secondly, the Group was an unrepresentative organisation voicing the opinions only of the individuals contained in it. The Group met occasionally, deliberated, and sometimes issued statements. Their pronouncements were intended mainly to influence council opinion rather than the electorate as a whole. The public meeting which had established the Group did not itself assume any permanent form, and thus the Group had no responsibility to a wider organisation and no lines of communication with any section of the public. As James Irvine pointed

out at the time: "The Group is well aware that its main function is discussion with an expression of opinion from time to time. Its members have not been elected by anyone and they therefore have no mandate for specific action."[4]

After slightly more than a year it became apparent to the Group that discussions amongst a closed circle would not have an impact on the Shetland political scene. A wider and somehow more legitimate base for promulgating the idea of island autonomy was needed. Members of the Group decided to change it into a more popular (and as will be argued below, populist) movement consisting of a wider cross-section of the public. They convened another public meeting which issued an invitation to the public at large to consider six principles for the establishment of a Shetland Movement in September 1978.

At this point some confusion arose in the public's mind as to what the core of the group were up to. The six aims were largely pragmatic. The need for a fishing plan for Shetland, or for adequate oil pollution control, were hardly matters with which any Shetlander would have taken issue. In drawing up the six aims, the steering committee, dominated by the old Shetland Group, unceremoniously dropped the question of autonomy to the bottom of the list, and watered it down to read: "to seek additional constitutional powers to be conferred on the local authority, possibly special status involving limited law-making and tax-raising powers".[5]

The six point platform was unanimously adopted by a second public meeting, this time of some 200 people in Lerwick, who went on to select an executive committee of 16, consisting of eight members of the old Shetland Group, and eight "new" men whose interests were more in tune with the pragmatic, issue-by-issue approach of the new movement.

The Movement did not press autonomy on prospective recruits as their primary objective, and the impression amongst the public seems to have been that the idea of the Movement was to "try to do something" about the immediate issues of the day affecting Shetland, such as lack of progress in EEC talks on fishing policies, high air and freight fares, the cost of living, and other matters which all seemed to show that Shetland was being penalised for being a remote community. There may have been some confusion between the Movement and the public on

this, in that the Movement maintain that the specific, pragmatic aims were put forward as topics which they felt should be considered by a commission which would investigate island problems and suggest a suitable form of government to deal with them.[6] However, while at that time it was universally expected that there would be a commission (as provided under the Scotland Act), the platform of the Movement made no mention of the commission as a means of achieving autonomy.

Some of the early material of the Movement was even vaguer, and supports the belief that the executive encouraged members to join a pressure group rather than a body dedicated to achieving Home Rule. In a recruiting advertisement, the Movement described their aim as: "To formulate without regard to party, race or creed, such measures as may be expected to secure and enhance the rights and aspirations of the people of Shetland."[7]

Such a statement was a clear example of the populist approach of the Movement, populist in the sense of reflecting, chameleon style, popularly expressed opinions, rather than formulating principles of its own which would enable it to lead from the front rather than from behind. Given the unexceptional aim in the recruiting advertisement, many people who felt that problems were not being solved through the normal channels signed up in the hope of giving impetus to the attempts to find solutions.

The Movement's leaders stated that they wanted to reflect the wishes of the people rather than to state a specific philosophy which people could subscribe to or oppose. An editorial in the strongly pro-Movement "New Shetlander" argued: "Dissatisfaction with the present situation stems from a variety of sources, including fishing limits, freights, finance and structure of local government. A Shetland Movement would provide a platform for all those interested to be represented and where a more acceptable alternative could be hammered out."[8]

Looking back over that first year, the chairman of the Movement, James Irvine, admitted in December 1979 that the advance guard had been reticent about pressing their ideas of autonomy on the electorate: "There was a reluctance on the part of the members of the executive committee to push some of the more far-reaching points in which they themselves believed without first sounding out Shetland opinion. So

the movement, rightly or wrongly, adopted a fairly low-key profile in its first year."

And proving the point about a populist approach, he added: "We appeal to all Shetlanders to let us know their feelings - either through criticisms or support. Future change is likely, we think desirable. The nature of that change should and must be of the sort that the people of Shetland want. We believe that more and more people are thinking about and talking about the issues at stake. Your voices must be heard."[9]

There has been one great advantage for the Shetland Movement in a populist approach. Once having defined the agenda of politics - which by retaining the initiative on discussion of constitutional issues in Shetland, they have done rather successfully - they have been able to summarise their perceptions of the public's views and then claim backing for their proposals on the grounds that the public at large want them. This has not been a devious process, for the leaders of the Movement are honest men, but it is nonetheless true that they equate what they advocate with what is wanted by the electorate at large, on the basis that if the electorate did not want such policies, they would not advocate them, and indeed would advocate different ones in order to retain their leadership. In this way they have set themselves up consciously or otherwise, as the leaders of political life in Shetland and as the catalyst for political opinion (ironically their claim to be non-political has accelerated the process). It gives them also a spurious status as "spokesmen" of the Shetland people on constitutional matters.

With such a role in mind, the Movement set off on a tour of the countryside holding meetings from Sumburgh Head to Muckle Flugga. The outcome surprised the executive, in that they found that the opinion of the meetings was far more strongly in favour of Home Rule than they had dared to hope. With such popular approval they were able to move on to the next stage, which was to advocate autonomy with more resolve and conviction.

Between those countrywide meetings and the dramatic decision to go "all out" for Home Rule with fiscal autonomy in February 1980, the Movement held its first annual general meeting in September 1979.

The platform endorsed at the meeting did not anticipate the radical changes which were to be proposed to the membership only a few months later when they would be asked to approve a draft constitution for an atuonomous Shetland. At the AGM the list of pragmatic aims was longer than in the previous year, and these were now described as "interim measures leading to the form of government most appropriate to Shetland."[10]

The most significant decision taken at the AGM was to contest council elections. In its first year the Movement had been as impotent as the Shetland Group: not only had it lacked the political clout to achieve its aims, but it had refrained from involvement in the council chamber, the main forum of debate in Shetland politics. This was despite the fact that 12 of the 25 councillors now belonged to the Movement, although not sitting officially as Movement councillors.

In deciding that the Movement would contest seats at the next council elections, due in May 1982, the AGM took a conscious decision to move away from the pressure group activities of the first year (which, as the prospect of a commission to investigate Shetland's problems receded, were proving increasingly ineffective) and towards traditional political activity. Having been elected as independent councillors, the 12 had felt unable to act cohesively as a group and although, as will be seen, they had frequently tried to promote Movement aims through the council, they were aware that they would be unable to make an impact in a field they desperately need to move into until elected under their new colours.

The decision to put up candidates for the Council at the next elections also highlights anomalies in the Movement's highly centralised organisational structure. In deciding to contest seats, the AGM came to the extraordinary decision that the 12 councillors who were individual members of the Movement would be entitled to the party's nomination without a selection process in their electoral divisions. Thus the endorsement of these councillors has been given purely by virtue of their being in the Movement, and under the logic of the ruling it remains open for any other councillors who might want to protect themselves to join up and thereby neutralise opposition to their candidacies.

For the remaining 13 divisions no machinery for selecting candidates has been established, and no effort has yet been made to form parish branches throughout the islands. Thus the Movement retains its highly centralised structure, with power residing in the executive committee elected by the AGM, which in turn meets on an agenda drawn up by the previous executive committee. Power is firmly based at the top with the membership's role being that of endorsing, amending or rejecting the initiatives of the executive committee.

The period in which the Shetland Movement represented all things to all men came to an end with the adoption of the Home Rule proposals in February 1980. These were largely the handiwork of Councillor Sandy Cluness, a solicitor who has made extensive studies of island constitutions such as those of Faroe and the Isle of Man. Although favouring the Faroese system himself, he concluded - and the executive committee concurred - that the British Government might be more amenable to the Manx system, with which they are more familiar, being adopted as the model for Shetland.

Under his plan, Shetland would be governed by eight boards covering a variety of topics for each aspect of internal government excluding the health service and higher education, which would remain functions of central government. Fiscal independence would be ensured by an assumed contribution of rates on Sullom Voe terminal by the oil industry of £20,000,000 per annum towards the total estimated expenditure of Shetland (calculated for the year 1982) of £38,853,000. The whole system would be responsible to an islands Parliament called the Althing, and there would be "safety clauses" under which the autonomous constitution could be ended if Shetland landed in the same plight as the bankrupt Newfoundland of the 1930s.[11] This seems a wise provision given the size of the public debt of the Shetland Islands Council and the estimates of the oil companies that the Brent and Ninian pipelines will peak in production in 1984 and cease gushing with oil in 1997.[12]

The scheme was overwhelmingly adopted by 220 votes for and only four against out of a membership of 500. Although this was a huge margin of acceptance, many people who had joined failed to respond

to the call either to return the form sent to them, or to attend the special meeting of members held in Lerwick. To offset that, however, the recruitment of a further 100 members within three months of the adoption of the plan indicates that the new departure has given some fresh impetus to the Movement.

So what of the membership of the Movement? The number of people who responded to the executive's call for approval or disapproval of their constitution indicates that a sizeable proportion of the members are inactive: somewhere around 270 members expressed no opinion on the scheme compared to 224 who did. The conclusion must be that many of those who joined in a moment of patriotism or perhaps were persuaded by the enthusiasm of an activist to take a membership card (in exchange for the £1 fee) have since grown lukewarm. For many people joined the Movement as a pressure group to try to exert some influence on the issues of the day - the plunder of fish stocks by foreigners, the insecurity in the fishing industry caused by the failure of the EEC to decide on a common fisheries policy guaranteeing Shetland's livelihood, the problems of oil pollution from tankers at Sullom Voe oil terminal and the dislocation of the economy by the construction boom there. When, like the Council, the Movement found that their "pressure" had no impact on these events, it would seem that these inactive members lapsed back into a fatalistic attitude about the future.

Can any pattern be discerned in the membership of the Movement? The leaders argue against suggestions that it is Lerwick-oriented and respond by claiming that membership covers Shetlanders from "Sumburgh Head to Muckle Flugga". They also argue that they do not draw their support from any particular groups in society, but instead are supported by Shetlanders from every economic grouping.

The composition of the executive may give us a better clue as to the profile of the membership. Of the 16 members, a key group of 10 are instantly recognisable as local authority employees or councillors. In some ways this is a reflection of the pervasive influence of local government in Shetland: the council is the largest single employer and has expanded into many fields not traditionally covered by local authorities (such as quarrying). But more importantly, people

connected with local government are likely to perceive the problems Shetland faces - and to understand the inadequacy of the channels for dealing with those problems - more clearly than people on the outside who are more likely to be suspicious of the authority's increasing role in the economy.

Within that group, a number have had the opportunity to see at first hand the more sensitive approach to the government of small islands that is characteristic of Scandinavian countries: the youngest member of the executive, John Goodlad, the fisheries officer of the council, travelled to Faroe and Iceland in preparing the Shetland Fisheries Plan (which incidentally advocates strong local control over stocks in Shetland waters). Three of the four councillors on the executive, Sandy Cluness, Gordon Walterson and James C Irvine (not to be confused with James W Irvine, the chairman), were involved in the Faroe and Isle of Man trips organised by the council to study island governmental systems. James C Irvine and John Jamieson, the former vice-convener of the Council, who is also on the executive, were both deeply involved in the previous Council's opposition to Shetland being included in the Scotland Act.

The other important groups are the schoolteachers and the fishermen: James W Irvine, the chairman, is a retired headmaster, while the two other teachers, John Graham and Jim Tait, both arrived in the Shetland Movement after lengthy association with the Shetland Labour Party. Both would see their membership of the Movement as compatible with that of the Labour Party, the aim being to bring local control over local affairs. All three took a keen interest in Shetland affairs before their membership of the Movement, and in particular in the folklore and culture of the islands. John Graham is both president of the Shetland Folk Society and the co-editor of "The New Shetlander" quarterly magazine (the other editor is his brother Laurence Graham, deputy chairman of the Shetland Labour Party and not a member of the Movement).

In their transition from Shetland Group to Shetland Movement, the executive picked up two recruits from the fishing fleet: two skippers, Jim Henry and Magnus Stewart. If the schoolteachers lend an intellectual tone to the proceedings, the fishermen are spokes-

men for a key area of the economy which is in danger of extinction if Shetland cannot secure something positive from the Common Fisheries Policy. The fishermen represent a particularly important section of the community who have never been afraid to put their point of view, and who understandably believe that they have a lot to gain from the autonomy of the islands. Interestingly, the same cannot be said for the crofting community, who receive identifiable and valuable aid from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland: the question of agriculture and the Movement is examined in more detail below.

Although at least five members of the executive are part-time crofters, none have come into the Movement directly because of their connection with agriculture. One is a retired sea captain and councillor; another a former vice-convener and agricultural adviser to the county; another, although a full-time crofter, was formerly a Fleet Street journalist (and incidentally is the only non-Shetlander on the executive). Crofting has not been a central part of the lives of any of these members, rather it has been either a peripheral activity, or one they have come to after working at something else.(13)

The profile of members of the Executive holds good for many of the other activists in the Movement: almost all male, many from Lerwick, many involved in local government (though rarely in manual jobs), more interest amongst fishermen than crofters, and surprisingly little participation by incomers (who are usually adept at getting themselves elected to committees).

What of the attitude of the islands' MP to these developments? Jo Grimond, who has represented Orkney and Shetland in Parliament since 1950, and who now cuts a rather elder-statesman-like figure to his constitutuents, has said surprisingly little about the Movement. The main clue that we have to his attitude towards the Movement comes in his memoirs, published in 1979, almost one year after the Movement came into being. He devotes three non-committal sentences directly to the Movement:

> "In Shetland the Shetland Movement has drawn up a manifesto which 30 years ago would have been placed in different political categories. Most of these subjects would have been classified as outside the scope of councillors elected on local issues.
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> "The Shetland Movement embraces the future structure of the Government of the islands which is a constitutional matter, and fishing policy which is a matter for Westminster and Brussels."(14)

One of the inferences which can be drawn from these comments is that the system of government which Mr Grimond has supported and indeed personified over the past 30 years is no longer effective for the islands. It may well be also that as a result of the reverential attitude of islanders towards their MP some people have turned their political energies in another direction, namely towards trying to increase powers at local level. The post of Member of Parliament for Orkney and Shetland has for some years ceased to be considered political and has become almost entirely ambassadorial and Jo Grimond has filled that bill very well because of his knowledge of, and prestigious position within, the Westminster establishment.

Despite the effect he has had on the post of MP, Mr Grimond goes on in his Memoirs to make a highly relevant observation about modern Shetland politics; although he is referring here more specifically to the expanded role of the islands councils:

> "I mention this new departure because it may deeply affect the future of Orkney and Shetland. It is also symptomatic of the new outlook. The schoolmasters and hecklers at the back of the Lerwick Town Hall, the writers and readers of the local newspapers (at the end of the War) were concerned about large political issues. They resolutely held to Liberal, Labour or Conservative principles.
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> "They read or argued about politics and wrestled with general questions affecting mankind. Now politics are more like the running of a faceless conglomerate. The local directors leave many decisions to their officials and few people are interested in what aims the parent company should pursue so long as it pays off.
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> "That the party system needs revision has long been my view. But I adhere to my belief that political principles should set our course."(15)

The only major political party for which the Shetland Movement has caused problems is the Labour Party. As mentioned above, two of its senior members are also on the executive of the Movement. The existence of the Movement poses considerable difficulties for Labour

- on the one hand, Labour's members would like to see more local control over Shetland affairs (and at the time of writing is drawing up a document for a socialist road towards greater autonomy), but at the same time most members baulk at the idea of co-operating with Liberals, Conservatives and independents to achieve that aim. To most of them, the Movement is an unacceptable organisation because of its lack of ideological commitment in any direction. None of the three official Labour councillors - John Butler, William Smith, or Alex Morrison, has joined the Movement, and in general they have been hostile to it. The dilemma for Labour arises over those seeking dual membership of the two organisations. Jim Tait offered his resignation to the Labour Party in order to stay with the Movement: John Graham declared that he felt dual membership was not incompatible. Although some on the left of the Labour party would have liked to see their departure, the majority felt loth to push them out of such a small party, and shelved the issue.

The Conservatives have declared no stance on the question of the Movement, remaining as silent on the issue as the Liberals. Individuals in the SNP are, however, closely involved in the Movement: Councillor Arthur Williamson is on the executive, while Roy Gronneberg, one of the SNP's officials locally has been a strong supporter of the Movement. The SNP's support for Faroese status, if wanted by the islands, stretches back to the late 1960s, long before there was any serious interest in the islands about the issue.

The relationship of the 12 councillors who are members of the Movement to the organisation's activities is an interesting one. They all insist that having been elected as independents in the 1978 elections (which took place before the Movement's founding) they should continue to serve as such until the end of their four year term. In general, these councillors have behaved as continuing independents who do not automatically follow specific Movement policies or attempt to promote them in a concerted manner inside the council chamber. But there are highly significant exceptions to this rule. The Faroese and Manx visits by councillors in the autumn of 1979 are a case in point. These were intended to give councillors a better understanding of island governments before they came to any conclusion

about the system Shetland should adopt - conclusions which nine months after the trips still had not been formulated.

The debates on the Manx and Faroese trips in August 1979 show how the general rule of separating Movement and council politics can be swiftly dropped as councillors urge each other to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement. The debates pitched two members of the Movement, Chris Dowle (who as a Labour left-winger shortly afterwards left the Movement because of its lack of ideological commitment) and Edward Thomason against a bevvy of other councillors who felt they would benefit from the experience of seeing the systems at first-hand. Both of them argued that the trips were jaunts and that if councillors wanted to learn about the systems of island governments in Faroe and the Isle of Man they should read the words of those who had made extensive studies of them.

The references to the Movement make revealing reading: "Captain Gordon Walterson (a member of the Movement's executive) was all in favour of the trip; any councillor who wished to go should go. He was slightly surprised at Mr Dowle, a member of the Movement, bringing up this matter." And Councillor James C Irvine: "As a member of the Shetland Movement he thought they should go to Faroe and the Isle of Man. They should reread the Nevis Report (on constitutional models for Shetland) and think about the best constitutional options for these islands."

And another Shetland Movement member, Councillor Ray Bentley: "Within the devolution group (i.e. the constitutional working group) and in the Shetland Movement there was a lot of activity to get information to place before any constitutional commission which might be set up. If Shetland could benefit by visits to Faroe or the Isle of Man for that matter then it was worth it." And later in the debate: "Another Shetland Movement member, Mr Bill Playfair, thought the visit would be in Shetland's interests. If a commission was appointed within a month or two they should demonstrate they had an interest in the island situation." And finally Chris Dowle: "He believed that Shetland should have more say in its own affairs but his motion did not hinder the Shetland Movement, whatever it had been doing recently. He remained unconvinced this visit would achieve

anything."[16] The references to the Movement are made as if it has achieved the status of some kind of fourth estate in the constitution, and in many ways the position accorded it by councillors in the debate is reminiscent of the way MPs in one-party states in Africa hold the supreme political body in their countries in high esteem. It would be equally fair to point out that if councillors who were individual members of the Tory, Labour or Liberal parties had been referring to their organisations in a similar manner, they would have been told by fellow-councillors to keep politics out of the council chamber.

Another example of the influence of the Movement in decision-making processes in the council can be seen in the activities of the constitutional working group. Of the six councillors on this body, four are members of the Shetland Movement. In its earlier guise as the devolution working group this body, as a sub committee, had a surprisingly large say in the formulation and public presentation of the Council's attitude toward the Labour government's devolution bills. The successor group had by mid-1980 a far less dramatic and public existence, although that was probably because in the immediate post-devolution period the council spent many months deciding how it should continue its constitutional activities. With that period virtually over, the four Movement members of the group are at the time of writing strategically placed to influence council policy on the constitutional status of the islands.

Interestingly, the draft of the Shetland Movement's proposals for a constitution drawn up in September 1979 by Councillor Sandy Cluness and approved in a subsequent form by the Movement's membership, was initially submitted to the Councils' constitutional working group by Councillor Cluness, a member of the group, for their information. After discussing different forms of island government the document, under the heading "The Shetland Islands", outlines the attitude of Councillor Cluness to the Council's role on constitutional matters:

> "The following proposals assume that the Shetland Islands Council is prepared to make representations to a Commission or other authority set up by central Government to alter the constitution of the islands. I would however wish to express my opinion that the islands council has no mandate to represent the Shetland people in constitutional matters.
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> "The only expression of support for the Council was in relation to the original Grimond amendment, and I consider that the Council's subsequent agreement with Mr Grimond to accept the Labour Government's amendment to have damaged the Council's strategic position in constitutional matters. Therefore while the Bill's failure is now history, it is my opinion that any future proposals by the Council should again be submitted to the people by way of a referendum before any submission to a Commission or any other body."

As the final paragraph in the document states, the paper was submitted to his fellow-members of the constitutional working group by Councillor Cluness with the intention of helping them formulate their views on the islands' future constitutional status. The final paragraph reads:

> "In conclusion I should emphasise that these are draft proposals which will be strengthened over a period in accordance with my own political convictions. Naturally, I also hope that the report will be of some limited assistance to the constitutional working group."[17]

Although drafted initially for the document produced for the constitutional working group, the proposed constitution for Shetland made its first appearnce in public not in connection with the constitutional working group, but under the auspices of the Shetland Movement. In a way this is not surprising, as the activities of the group are not recorded in minutes for inspection by the public or the full council, and therefore are largely the concern of the six members involved. Again, there seems to be no clear distinction between the activities of members of the Movement within their own private political organisation and their activities as councillors.

A third example arose in the chairman's committee of the Council at the time of the Faroese trip. Members of the Shetland Movement had asked Councillor James Irvine if the secretary and chairman of the Movement might travel on the council's plane. Instead of declaring interests as Movement members, James Irvine and Sandy Cluness moved that the two be allowed to travel with the party provided they paid their own costs. An amendment by Edward Thomason that other political parties be asked if they wished to join the trip failed to find a seconder. Although the Movement's motion was

defeated by other councillors who felt that two pupils of the Anderson High School should go instead, the incident is illustrative of the special status councillors involved in the Movement feel their organisation should have.[18]

Public debate about the Movement, although their executive always wanted to stimulate it, tended to be sporadic before the publication of the draft proposals for a constitution. But the publication of the document brought a wide range of comment and criticism of the Movement. This earlier lack of criticism may have been due to the general worthiness of the Movement's activities and the rather uncontroversial profile the Movement sought to portray in the first phase of its existence.

The criticisms in the letters columns of "The Shetland Times" at the time of the publication of the draft constitution ranged from the view that Movement members were power hungry and anxious to line their own pockets through the bureaucratic jobs that would be created with autonomy, to the view that an autonomous Shetland could not survive the monetarist and inflationary policies of Thatcher's Government. Of all the letters, the most pertinent came from a Tingwall farmer who stressed the important role of central government in sustaining the islands' agriculture.

"A hundred years ago a crofter's house was a hovel. Today due to government grants and low interest long term loans he lives in a modern house with all mod cons," was one of his examples. "What now is offered by the Shetland Movement to replace this "disaster" (as Sandy Cluness had described present agricultural policies)? "A vague promise to 'support it by a better method'. They will have to do better than that if they are to get crofters to join their Movement."[19]

The Movement was also attacked by those who felt the Movement had no end in view, but was instead solely concerned with governmental mechanisms. An editorial in "The Shetland Times" commented that they might have looked at the question of how many boards should run Shetland if the Movement had first "asked us to view, even with rose-tinted spectacles, the social and economic transformation they sought to achieve."[20] In a debate at the Althing Debating Society, the islands' archivist, Brian Smith, argued "that the Movement was a popu-

list and emotional response to a political problem which could only be solved through political action. The Shetland Movement had not attempted to develop a political philosophy."

Returning to the attack, and dismissing Brian Smith's arguments, John Graham and Sandy Cluness, for the Movement, "stated that they saw nothing wrong in a popularist movement and could not see why the movers were opposed to an organisation which developed from the grassroots. It was unlikely that the main political parties would support moves for greater autonomy for Shetland and what was needed was a concerted effort by everyone in Shetland."[21] This last point raises interesting questions about how the Movement perceives its status. As noted above, the Movement has tried to show that it is non-political in deference to the widespread dislike of political parties in Shetland. To emphasise this difference, it has declared that when autonomy has been achieved (after approval through a referendum) the Movement will dissolve itself. Their preferred scenario would be this: the electorate would return a majority of councillors in 1982 on the Shetland Movement ticket, and this would be a mandate for seeking Home Rule; central government would see the strength of feeling on the issue and through a commission draw up proposals for autonomy which would be approved through a referendum; the constitution established, the founding fathers would retire to their Mount Vernons and Monticellos and disband the Shetland Movement; Shetland would revert to the normal system of government by independent councillors. The architects seem to see no need for collective responsibility for their planned collective actions. If the autonomy scheme went hopelessly wrong in practice, it would not be the architects who would be dealing with the problems thrown up by autonomy, but ordinary individual councillors not responsible for creating the framework they would be working within.

This question is allied to that raised separately by Jo Grimond, Brian Smith and "The Shetland Times" about party and ideological commitment. The Shetland Movement collectively have no idea of the kind of Shetland they would like to see. Indeed, they seem to be a logical product of the Shetland of the 1970s, where local government grew, as Grimond suggests, from a small county council into "a faceless conglom-

erate". The Movement has expressed no desire to alter the structure of powerful bureaucratic control by officials over the democratically elected members. This is shown in the concept of governing Shetland through a series of boards which would even contain non-elected members drawn from outside bodies. The system seems to reflect very closely the idea of corporate government which exists in Shetland, in which any criticism outside bodies might make of the council is muted by drawing them into working groups which meet in secret. The result is that disputes are defused or are drawn underground out of the public eye. The Movement is itself one such outside body.

What significance does the Movement's development have in the overall Scottish context? At the moment, the answer must be that it has none, because it has no power base in local government, although as we have seen it has the potential to make a significant impact on council policy towards autonomy when the local authority comes to formulate its ideas. But since the local authority - as well as the Movement - want a commission to investigate Shetland's status, the Government, with the knowledge of the role of such instruments (namely of neutralising problems for a number of years) are not going to be worried about that. The only problems for the Scottish Office would arise if the Movement achieved majority backing for its aims. Whether that will happen depends on the mood of Shetland in May 1982 when the islands could very well be in a slump following the end of the construction boom at Sullom Voe. The test would be whether the Movement could harness the economic discontent, and forge an effective fighting coalition committed to building up the indigenous economy just as the islands did in their economic revival in the 1960s.

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